

**FUTURE FISHERIES IMPROVEMENT PROGRAM
REVIEW PANEL MEETING MINUTES
WINTER 2012**

Future Fisheries Panel Members: Alan Johnstone, Ann Schwend, Rick Arnold, Marvin Miller, Gary Frank, Jim Stone, Bonnie Gundrum, William Gavin, Corey Fisher, Chuck Dalby, Levi Luoma

Interested Parties: Will McDowell, Patti Mason, John Hawe, Rebecca Ramsey, Michael A. Bias, Rob Miller, Jeff Vaskey, Rob Roberts, Ryen Neudecker, Jeff Ryan

FWP Staff: Mark Lere, Jim Darling, Beth Giddings, Bruce Rich, Lee Nelson

Mark introduced Levi Luoma as the new student panel member and welcomed back all of the members who were re-appointed by the governor. He handed out the agenda and balance sheet for the Future Fisheries Program. There are about \$953,000 dollars remaining in the program, with most of the funding being RIT funds.

1. Browns Gulch (Silver Bow County) is a tributary to Silver Bow Creek located near the community of Ramsey that supports westslope cutthroat trout in the upper reaches and brook trout in the lower reaches. With the continued clean-up of Silver Bow Creek, there is potential to re-establish migratory connectivity for westslope cutthroat trout between Silver Bow Creek and Browns Gulch. This project calls for installing 5 denil-style fish ladders on existing irrigation structures located on the Ueland and Liva ranches to enhance fish passage. Additionally, the project calls for replacing an undersized culvert, installing a headgate on one of the diversions, stabilizing about 1,200 feet of stream channel, installing 6,500 feet of fencing and constructing two livestock water gaps. The applicant is asking for \$56,705 in Program funds and is providing \$72,085 in matching funds and \$5,900 in in-kind services toward completion of the project. FWP staff support the project as proposed (\$56,705). (RIT eligible)

Presenter: Will McDowell

Discussion: The Panel had questions about the landowners allowing public fishing and to what extent the landowners are involved, and the length of the project agreement. Will responded that they do allow public fishing. The standard project agreement is for 20 years. The Panel had concerns over the lack of design details and lack of an overview map showing project details and location. The Panel also wanted more details about grazing management.

Motioned: Jim Stone motioned to table the project

Second: Chuck Dalbey

All in favor: Yes, project was tabled.

Public Comment: None

2. Cottonwood Creek (Powell County), a tributary to the Clark Fork River at Deer Lodge, recently has been documented to support fluvial cutthroat trout, as well as brown trout. Portions of Cottonwood Creek historically were channelized and over-grazed by livestock.

This project calls for restoring stream channel habitat on about 2,200 feet of stream located on the Johnson Ranch. Project activities would include reconstructing about 940 feet of new channel alignment, constructing 1,400 feet of inset floodplain benches, installing several rock weirs and vanes and installing 5,000 feet of electric fencing to protect the riparian corridor. The applicant is seeking \$60,558 in Program funds and is providing \$61,305 in matching funds and \$18,200 in in-kind services toward completion of the project. FWP staff generally supported the channel restoration and riparian protection efforts that are being proposed, but had concerns over some aspects of the design, as well as concerns about the cost of installing willow sprigs. FWP staff felt that the rock structures (weirs and vanes) being proposed were not appropriate for this channel type. Additionally, staff felt that the proposed cost of \$2.00 per willow sprig was excessive. As a result, FWP staff recommend removing the Program cost of \$9,340 for the rock structures and cutting the sprigging cost in half (\$1.00 per sprig); reducing the request by a total of \$12,752. (Reduce funding to \$47,806) (RIT eligible)

Presenter: Will McDowell

Discussion: The Panel had concerns for the potential for upstream movement of rainbow trout and the fact that FWP consistently has observed hardened structures usually failing in alluvial channels. Will responded that he has been working with FWP Biologist Jason Lindstrom who is in favor on restoring connectivity to the Clark Fork River and rainbow are not abundant. A major concern is that funds for this project have not been secured. There were questions about substrate size and movement and if the landowner would allow access. Will responded that fishing access is given on request.

Motioned: The panel motioned to fund the project at a reduced amount of \$53,733.

Action: Project was approved at reduced funding amount.

Public Comment: Jeff Ryan (DEQ) recommended seeking a volunteer component to reduce the costs of sprigs.

3. Greenhorn Creek (Madison County) is a tributary to the Ruby River that supports non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout. This population of westslope cutthroat trout is unlikely to persist without conservation efforts that reduce or eliminate competition and potential hybridization from non-native brook trout and rainbow trout. This project calls for constructing a migration barrier near the confluence of the North and South forks to help protect about 12 miles of cutthroat habitat. The barrier would be located on state lands currently leased by Turner Enterprises, Inc. Since 2007, state and federal agencies have removed brook trout from this reach of stream using multiple pass electrofishing techniques. Removal efforts would continue after barrier construction. The applicant is asking for \$81,983 in Program funding and is contributing \$92,000 in matching funds towards completion of the project. FWP staff supported the project as proposed. (\$81,983) (RIT eligible)

Presenter: Lee Nelson

Discussion: The panel had questions about the historic genetic work performed by Oswald, if fishing access would be allowed and if the barrier design could be blended more into the landscape. Lee confirmed that access would be allowed except on the Turner property.

Motioned: Rick Arnold motioned to approve the project as proposed.
Second: Ann Schwend
All in favor: Yes, approved as proposed

4. Haskill Creek (Flathead County) is a tributary to the Whitefish River located near the town of Whitefish that supports a brook trout fishery. A few westslope cutthroat trout also are found in the stream. Past channel straightening and riparian vegetation clearing have impaired stream conditions and increased sediment supply to the stream. This project, located on property owned by Kurt Reimer, calls for stabilizing 1,222 feet of channel by constructing floodplain benches using two different techniques. The first technique involves installing a series of fabric wrapped soil lifts incorporated with layers of willow sprigs. The second technique involves the construction of a stream bank composed of large pieces of stacked rootwads located at the toe of the constructed bank. Transplanted willow clumps would be interspersed among the wood pieces. The intent of the project is to improve water quality and provide a demonstration site for potential future channel stabilization projects. The applicant is requesting \$10,909.54 in Program funding and is providing \$40,000 in matching funds and \$23,692 in in-kind services towards completion of the project. FWP staff supported the project as proposed. (\$10,909.54)

Presenter: Patti Mason

Discussion: The panel generally agreed that the proposal was well organized and the project would be beneficial. There were questions about equipment and labor. Patti confirmed that the landowners will provide the equipment and labor, and the local high school will use the project for educational purposes. Additional questions were about riparian management plan and Patti replied that there was no plan for fencing since there presently are no cattle. The landowner would need to comply with weed control and agricultural activity. Patti also responded to a question about browse protectors, saying that the material would be removed. Mark Lere clarified that this project is not RIT eligible because it would benefit primarily brook trout, not cutthroat trout.

Motioned: Ann Schwend motioned to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Jim Stone

All in favor: Yes, approved as proposed.

Public Comment: Question about additional volunteer help but applicant responded that they would pursue Boy Scouts if necessary.

5. Helena Valley Regulating Reservoir (Lewis and Clark County), located near Helena, supports a popular kokanee fishery. The reservoir provides a source of water for the Helena Valley Irrigation District and is owned and operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation. This kokanee population is maintained primarily through hatchery stocking. Reservoir releases into the canal are known to entrain some kokanee into the canal. The applicant is asking for \$10,000 in Program funding and is providing no matching funds toward installation of a fish screen at the canal entrance. Trapping studies conducted by the local FWP biologist have shown a relatively low number of fish being entrained into the canal over the past two years. Additionally, screening such a large canal entrance (at least 100

cubic feet per second) likely would cost 30-fold what the applicant is requesting. As a result, FWP staff recommended that this funding request be denied. (Deny)

Presenter: John Hawe

Discussion: The Panel stated that the screen may be advisable but had concerns about the cost estimate and maintenance for the screen, as well as the lack of a specific screen design. The Panel also was concerned about the lack of support letters for this project from the local FWP fisheries biologist and the Bureau of Reclamation. Future Fisheries funding may not apply here since the emphasis is on wild fish. John responded that the maintenance would be minimal and the screen design would be simple on the existing outlet. He mentioned that he had contacted the previous biologist for this reservoir for support on this proposal.

Motioned: Chuck Dalbey motioned to deny

Second: Rick Arnold

All in favor: Yes – project denied.

Public Comment: The public perception is that spawning fish are being lost and that FWP is wasting fish. Consultation with a hydrologist indicated that a simple screen could be installed. The Panel recommended that the applicant meet with the local watershed group to help bring the agencies together who manage this lake.

6. Little Otter Creek (Judith Basin County) is a tributary to Big Otter Creek located near the community of Raynesford that supports brook trout, brown trout and rainbow trout. An existing corral system located on the Vaskey Ranch is encroaching into the stream, causing excessive sedimentation and degraded water quality. The proposal calls for relocating the corral away from the stream corridor, re-vegetating the disturbed area with trees, shrubs and seed and fencing the riparian corridor to create a vegetative buffer. The project would restore between 100 and 300 yards of riparian corridor. The applicant is requesting \$6,020 in Program funding and is contributing \$20,614 in matching funds and \$10,000 in in-kind service towards completion of the project. FWP staff supported the project as proposed. (\$6,020)

Presenter: Jeff Vaskey

Discussion: The Panel had questions about the NCRS funding. The applicant replied that some had been secured.

Motioned: Ann Schwend motioned to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Gary Frank

All in favor: Yes, project approved.

7. Racetrack Creek (Powell County), as it flows through three separate properties owned by Evan Johnson, Jules Waber and Rick Duncan near the community of Galen, has been degraded in the past by removal of riparian vegetation and trampling of stream banks by livestock. Also, an existing irrigation diversion is creating a partial fish migration barrier. Lower Racetrack Creek primarily supports brook trout and brown trout. This project calls for removing an existing riparian fence damaged by past flooding located on the Waber property and replacing it with 2,000 feet of new fence set back between 100 and 150 feet from the stream. Approximately 600 feet of old riparian fence would be removed on the

Johnston property and replaced with 400 feet of new fenced installed on an adjacent terrace. In association, an off-site well would be drilled and two winterized stock tanks would be installed. Additionally, an existing rustic irrigation diversion would be rebuilt with a new pin and plank structure and a denil-style fish ladder installed to provide for upstream fish migration. On the Duncan property, 250 feet of new riparian fencing would be installed. The applicant is requesting \$46,037 in Program funding and is contributing \$2,100 in matching funds and \$6,820 in in-kind services towards completion of the project. FWP staff generally supported the project, but wanted to see a greater matching contribution. As a result, FWP staff supported funding half of the cost of the following: off-site water development (\$9,570); fencing (\$2,319); diversion structure (\$8,200); heavy equipment and mobilization (\$3,300); as well as all of the cost of the fish ladder (\$3,000); for a total of \$26,389. (Reduced funding to \$26,389)

Presenter: Will McDowell

Discussion: The Panel inquired about public access. Will replied access would be granted with permission. There were some questions about riparian fencing, weed control and channel migration. Will indicated that FWP had provided the original riparian fencing and the other concerns had been addressed with the landowner.

Motioned: The panel motioned to reduce funding to \$26,389, as recommended by FWP.

Second: Corey Fisher

All in favor: Yes, approved project at reduced funding.

8. The Ruby River (Madison County) located downstream from Ruby Reservoir, supports a mixed trout fishery. Portions of the river located on the Miller Ranch historically were straightened and the riparian vegetation removed to make more room for farming. This project calls for reconstructing the straightened channel to increase sinuosity from an existing 1.2 to 1.8 by lengthening the channel from approximately 2,000 feet to 3,500 feet. The project also would relocate an existing feedlot away from the river channel, install about 7,000 feet of riparian fencing and construct a bridge. The applicant is requesting \$40,661 in Program funding and is contributing \$339,190 in matching funds and \$29,000 in in-kind services toward project completion. FWP staff generally supported the project, but felt the cost of willow sprigs at \$1.75 per sprig was too high. FWP staff felt \$1.00 per sprig is more than adequate. As a result, FWP staff recommended reducing the funding by \$3,857 (difference between \$1.75 and \$1.00 per sprig). Staff also recommended requiring construction oversight by the design consultant. (Reduce funding to \$36,804 and require construction oversight by design consultant)

Presenter: Rebecca Ramsey

Discussion: Ann Schwend withdrew from the discussion and voting for conflict of interest. In general the Panel was impressed with the complete application and design for this project and for the stewardship and support from the landowner. Rebecca was accompanied by the landowners. This project has support from, NCRS, FWP staff and former staff Dick Oswald. Americorps and Trout Unlimited will assist with monitoring and labor efforts. The Conservation District, Army Corps, and DEQ also are involved. The Panel had additional questions about reducing the cost of willow springs, fish population estimates, funding for the new channel and

angler access. There was a request to see the designer provide oversight. Rebecca responded that fishing in the channelized portion is not good. The funding has been secured for the new channel. The angler access will be improved by this project.

Motioned: Jim Stone motioned to approve the original budget of \$40,661, with no reduction for willow sprigs.

Second: Alan Johnstone

All in favor: Yes, approved project as proposed. Ann Schwend abstaining

Public comment: Jeff Ryan in support for this project.

9. Skalkaho Creek (Ravalli County) supports populations of westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout in its upper drainage. An existing culvert on the Bitterroot National Forest located approximately 20.5 stream miles upstream from the confluence with the Bitterroot River acts as a partial barrier to upstream migrating fish. The width of the culvert only accounts for 44% of the streams bank full width and is perched approximately 1 foot above the outlet. During higher stream flow, typically a time when westslope cutthroat trout and bull trout tend to move upstream, excessive velocities within the culvert make upstream fish passage very unlikely. This project calls for replacing the undersized culvert with a free span bridge. The applicant is requesting \$5,000 in Program funds to go toward a total estimated project cost of \$160,000. FWP staff supported the project as proposed (\$5,000.00) (RIT eligible).

Presenter: Mark Lere - for Robert Brassfield, applicant

Discussion: None

Motioned: Alan Johnston to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Chuck Dalbey

All in favor: Yes, project approved as proposed.

10. The tributaries of Divide Creek (Silver Bow County) support conservation populations of westslope cutthroat trout. The South Fork of the North Fork of Divide Creek is the only tributary in the drainage that supports non-hybridized westslope cutthroat trout. Presently, the South Fork of the North Fork Divide Creek enters a 0.6 acre settling basin before flowing into the 4.1 acre South Fork Reservoir through a perched culvert. South Fork Reservoir provides municipal water to the city of Butte. The function of the settling basin is no longer needed due to some new water treatment facilities and the perched culvert currently blocks upstream migration of trout residing in the reservoir. This project calls for replacing the perched culvert located between the settling basin and the reservoir with a series of rock step-pools. A total of 6 step-pools would be installed, consisting of 1 foot drops and 3 to 5-foot long pools with 1 foot residual pool depths. The step-pools would allow for upstream fish migration from the reservoir. The applicant is requesting \$2,000 in Program funds and is contributing \$3,500 in matching funds and \$1,000 in in-kind services. Recreational fishing on the reservoir is not allowed due to the site being a municipal water source. FWP staff generally supported the project as proposed but needed clarification on how Program dollars specifically would be used. (\$2,000, with budget clarification) (RIT eligible)

Presenter: Michael A. Bias, PhD

Discussion: Mark Lere (FWP) asked for details on the service contract. Michael responded that Future Fisheries would agree to pay half of the contractor fees to construct the step pools. Grouting the step pools would prevent ice damage. FWP biologist Jim Olsen is in support of the project.

Motioned: Rick Arnold motioned to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Will Gavin

All in favor: Yes, project approved as proposed.

Public Comment: Jeff Ryan (DEQ) is in support

11. Twin Creek (Missoula County) is a tributary to Ninemile Creek that supports a mixed fish assemblage. Due to past placer mining activity, Twin Creek has been greatly altered, especially within its lower reaches near the confluence with Ninemile Creek. Altered conditions include ditching of the channel, dewatering, and loss of connection with Ninemile Creek. At the proposed project site, the stream is diverted into a series of man-made ditches for about 200 feet before cascading down into an old dredge pond. This project calls for moving and re-grading about 10,000 cubic yards of mine tailings, filling in the dredge pond and constructing a new channel that connects directly with Ninemile Creek. Approximately 625 feet of new channel would be constructed. Approximately 40 step-pools, constructed of rock and log structures, would be incorporated into the design. The project also calls for extensive re-vegetation, including sowing native grass seed, incorporating willow cuttings into the newly constructed banks and planting containerized shrubs along the riparian corridor. The applicant is requesting \$41,000 in Program funding and is contributing \$102,850 in matching funds and \$16,100 in in-kind services. FWP staff supported the project as proposed (\$41,000) (RIT eligible).

Presenter: Rob Roberts

Discussion: The Panel had questions on the creek's ability to handle the raised berm and if westslope cutthroat would be restored as a result of the project. A suggestion was made to see the federal government contribute more money since the project is located on national forest lands. Rob clarified that future monitoring will be done by the USFS and university professors. Letters of recommendation were obtained by FWP Biologist Ladd Knotek.

Motioned: Ann Schwend motioned to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Rick Arnold

All in favor: Yes, project approved as proposed. Corey Fisher abstained.

12. Willow Creek (Lewis and Clark County) is a tributary to the Blackfoot River located near the town of Lincoln that supports a mixed fish assemblage, including genetically pure westslope cutthroat trout. An existing road culvert located on property owned by Jerry and Susan Biresch acts as a partial fish migration barrier and creates localized bank erosion. This project calls for replacing the undersized and perched culvert with an appropriately sized free-span bridge. The applicant is requesting \$11,000 in Program funding and is contributing \$7,000 in matching funds and \$9,520 in in-kind services. FWP staff supported the project as proposed. (\$11,000.00) (RIT eligible.)

Presenter: Ryen Neudecker

Discussion: The Panel had questions about rainbow movement, public access, and clarifying another culvert crossing. Ryen responded that there is no rainbow movement. The culvert crossing will be proposed next year. The landowner will be allowing access after the project is finished.

Motioned: Ann Schwend motioned to approve the project as proposed.

Second: Will Gavin

All in favor: Yes, project approved as proposed. Corey Fisher abstaining as employee of TU

Public Comment: Jeff Ryan (DEQ) asked for confirmation that runoff from the new bridge deck would be contained.

13. Wise River (Beaverhead County), the largest tributary to the Big Hole River, supports a mixed fish assemblage, including fluvial arctic grayling. A substantial irrigation infrastructure replacement project is being undertaken on the lower reaches of the Wise River. This infrastructure project involves consolidating five points of diversion into a single diversion point and installing one permanent diversion structure, a new headgate and a series of flow monitoring devices. The cost of this infrastructure replacement project totals \$200,000. The benefits of consolidating five points of diversion into one and eliminating the need for the annual construction of gravel berms are very high. As a small part of this project, the applicant is seeking Program funding to install a fish ladder into the diversion headgate to better enable fish entrained into the ditch to migrate back to the river once the headgate is shut at the end of the irrigation season. The applicant is requesting \$10,000 in Program funding and is not providing any associated match, except that associated with the larger infrastructure replacement project. FWP staff supported the project as proposed. (\$10,000)

Presenter: Mark Lere for Jen Titus.

Discussion: Panel asked questions about this experimental concept of installing a fish ladder in the ditch and its benefit for westslope cutthroat. FWP Biologist Jim Olsen supports this project.

Motioned: Alan Johnstone motioned to table and have the applicant present more information during the next funding cycle.

Second: Rick Arnold

All in favor: Yes, project tabled. Ann Schwend abstained.

Future Fisheries Application

Jim Darling – staff will revise the Future Fisheries application form in attempt to better ascertain if public access is allowed.

Selection of Panel Member to help rank approved projects

Panel unanimously appointed Rick Arnold.

Ann Schwend commented that the applicants should be able to review the ranking criteria and suggested criteria be posted on FWP's website.

Funding Balances

The Panel recommended approval of a total of \$83,979.54 in license funding and \$194,716 in RIT funding during the meeting.

Next Meeting- summer 2012

Week of June 18th -first choice for touring projects in Blackfoot drainage

June- 26, or 27 - second choice for touring projects in the Blackfoot drainage

The following day would be the regular meeting - to be held in Helena.

Meeting adjourned.